

## **EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEEDS IN THE FIELD OF VISITORS RECEIVING STRUCTURES AND TOURISM SERVICES IN THE LOWER DANUBE REGION**

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### **Abstract**

The paper analyzes the new realities and conditions for the development of tourism in the Lower Danube region in the context of the "Danube Strategy" of the EU, the state of the Bulgarian and Romanian tourist market, and the Romania market, as well as the possibilities for development of alternative tourism along the Danube. Special attention has been paid to the problems of education and training in the field of tourist facilities and services in Bulgaria and Romania and the need for their improvement.

The reasons for this are that education and training are strategic factor for sustainable development through contribution to human capital development, within the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013. In relation to this the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest, Romania and D. Tsenov Academy of Economics in Svishtov, Bulgaria decided to collaborate in the field "Cooperation on human resources development – joint development of skills and knowledge", through the development of cross-border liaisons and exchanges between the two universities.

Both Bulgaria and Romania have represented and still represent important tourism destinations in Eastern Europe, promoting coastal tourism, spas, mountain resorts or heritage tourism. Comparing with the existent potential and with the other Central and East-European countries, including Bulgaria, Romania has modest economical performances in tourism industry.

The last decade shows a relative decline of external demand for Romania, the main causes being the missing fund for investment in developing, modernization, and rehabilitation of specific infrastructure, the less diversification of the entertainment, the tourism services' quality – lesser comparative with competitors. On other hand, in the same period, Bulgaria has improved the tourism services' quality and economic performances.

Training specialists in tourism is one of the ways of performance growth in this field. Although there are numerous educational institutions for tourism professionals (high school and vocational school, universities with Bachelor and Masters Degrees, post university and doctoral studies), in both countries the quality of the tourism employees is low and unable to sustain high quality services.

Therefore, trans-border cooperation in tourism between Romania and Bulgaria can bring benefits both in better turning to account the touristic potential and the educational systems of the two countries.

**Keywords:** tourism and hospitality industry, economic crisis, Lower Danube strategy, education, training needs, bachelor and masters programs.

**JEL classification:** A29, L83, J21, R11.

### **Romanian Situation\***

In Romania, tourism represents an economic sector with a valuable development potential, but to date, it is insufficiently well explored. For this reason, tourism could become an attractive source of interest for both investors and tourists (Romanian and foreign). But this idea is more theoretical than practical, because of the keen competition from neighbouring countries (Hungary, Bulgaria, and Croatia) and the complexity of issues concerning the competitiveness level of Romanian tourism.

Romania used to be a hot-spot for foreign tourists and it used to have a developed internal tourism, carried on legal based still from inter-war period. In the first half of sixties, the Romanian tourism accommodation capacity has experienced a significant development, especially at the Black Sea side. At the beginning of seventies, Romania was already a well known, established tourist destination, especially among the principal European countries, generating significant tourism arrivals, especially from Germany, United Kingdom, and the Scandinavian countries, France, Italy, Austria and Belgium.

By the eighties, Romania has started to experience a strong decline of foreign tourists arrivals, trend slowly extended till the 90s. The main cause was the lack of funds for investment in developing, modernization and rehabilitation of specific infrastructure. This was the consequence of a very slow and painstakingly difficult process of privatization, the enforcement of an inappropriate tax policy and the lack of facilities in obtaining loans from commercial banks (Minciu and Tigu, 2008).

At present, Romanian tourism industry is characterized, at global level, by the following indicators:

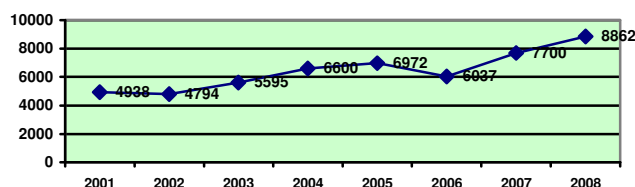
- 8.9 million foreign visitors (in 2008);
- 13 million outbound Romanian tourists (same year);
- more than 1.000 million US Dollars income from international tourism;
- 2.04% in GDP (Gross Domestic Product) (according to the National Statistic Institute);
- 4.7% in GDP (in 2005), conforming with WTTC (World Travel & Tourism Council);
- 105 thousand jobs (1.2% in total jobs of Romanian economy);

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Investments in “Hotels and restaurants” (as percentage of total investments in Romanian economy) have risen from 0.59% in 1990 to 1.62% in 2007.

Compared with the existent potential and with the other Central and East-European countries, Romania has a fairly modest economic performance in the tourism industry.



**Figure no. 1: International tourist arrivals in Romania (thousands of tourists)**

Source: 1) National Institute of Statistics, 2008. *Romania's Statistical Yearbook*. Bucharest: National Institute of Statistics. And 2) National Institute of Statistics, 2010. *INSSE – Statistical DB – TEMPO-Online time series*. [online] Bucharest: National Institute of Statistics. Available at: <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=en&ind=TUR107C> [Accessed 7 September 2010].

This dynamics of international tourist arrivals in Romania, and in parallel of a higher increase of outbound Romanian tourists, led to a relatively modest volume of revenues from tourism and – for a significantly long period of time – to a negative balance of payments in tourism. (Table no.1) As a matter of fact, European Union's statistics include Romania in the group of countries – main generators of tourists over the last 5 years (European Commission, 2008).

**Table no. 1: Balance of Payments in tourism (millions euro)**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Income	362	395	521	610	852	1034	1173	1358
Expenditure	449	444	570	673	750	1035	1120	1477
Balance	-87	-49	-51	-63	102	-1	53	-119

Source: Romanian National Bank, 2010. *Balanța de Plăți a României*. [online]. Available at: <http://www.bnro.ro/Publicatii-periodice-204.aspx> [Accessed 26 October 2010].

In contrast with all the advantages of the tourism potential, some surveys conducted by the WTO, based upon the information and market research done in the European countries – big generating tourism fluxes – or by the national tourism administration with foreign tourists in Romania design the Romanian tourism offer in the following way:

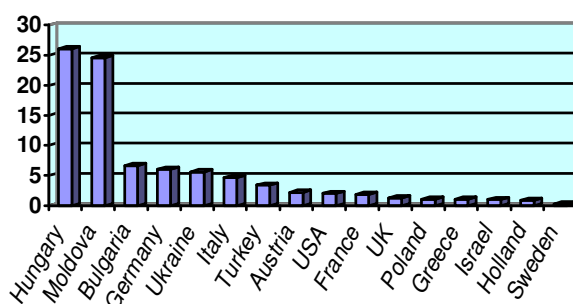
- all types of tourism programs offered by Romania meet a strong competition from the west-European markets;
- the competitive destination offers a lot of facilities for all tourist categories, but the Romanian offer is, in a way, limited, concentrated in a few resorts, and there, in a few hotels;

- the service quality is lower, by comparison with competitors from Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece or Cyprus;
- the entertainment is less diversified;
- technical and transportation infrastructure is inadequate;
- is imperative to improve the hotel comfort in large urban areas and in international tourism resorts;
- concerning the quality/ price ratio, Romania has ceased to be an attractive tourism market.

The surveys conducted by the Romanian National Authority for Tourism in cooperation with specialized research institutes from abroad, among potential and effective visitors from 12 international tourism markets, stressed out the following problems: the persistence of some problems about the image of Romania as a tourism destination, the need for the infrastructure for tourism to be developed and modernized in many areas, the tourism products offered by the Romanian tour operators are not attractive or price competitive vis-à-vis the same products offered by other destinations all over the world, the quality of services from most of the accommodation facilities, restaurants services do not raise to the same level as other destinations in Central Europe, the marketing efforts on tourism markets from abroad were inconsequent and/or insufficient (Tigu and Tuclea, 2008).

The generating regions and countries for international tourist arrivals in Romania are, first, Europe, with neighbouring countries like Hungary, Serbia, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Moldova.

The hierarchy of the most important countries for international tourist arrivals in Romania is showed in figure no. 2.



**Figure no. 2: Inbound tourism in Romania in 2007. Arrivals by countries (percents for total)**

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2008. *Romania's Statistical Yearbook*. Bucharest: National Institute of Statistics.

Worth mentioning is also the fact that, for the foreign tourists overnights indicator, the first markets for Romania are Germany, Italy, France, USA, Hungary (European Commission, 2008).

Surprisingly, the WTTC' forecasts about Tourism and Travel segment in Romania are rather positive. In accordance with these forecasts, Romania holds the 4th place from 174 countries concerning the demand growth ratio on long term. Being a NATO member country starting with 2002 and a European Union member state since 2007, has meant for Romania an rank increase, taking into consideration the world level. The investments in modernization and promotion are vital actions to transform Romania into an internationally successful tourism destination.

As a matter of fact, after the year 2000, Romania scored a high rate of increase in the number of international tourists' arrivals, i.e. 7.1%/year, concerning the accommodation of foreign tourists (European Commission, 2008).

Thus, the main general objectives which underline the basic development strategies for the Romanian tourism sector are (MDRT, 2009):

- Creating a diverse and competitive tourism offer by supporting national and foreign investment development, which would in turn lead to an increase in the size of tourist activities and tourist circulation, respectively;
- Stimulating the development of quality tourist services, which will translate into an increase in income level (in national and foreign currency), of the contribution of tourism to the internal revenue and to the net income of the population, as well as a better absorption of the workforce;
- Creating the conditions for integrating the Romanian tourism in the mainstream trend, present at a global and European level.

Among the specific objectives, some could be:

- A yearly increase in the number of tourists of 10%;
- Increasing the contribution of tourism to Gross National Income, in the 2007-2013 interval, to 6%;
- The yearly increase in the number of Romanian tourists by 5%;
- Creating some 350.000 network places in the tourism industry, from 2007 to 2013.

The analysis of the current stage of Romanian tourism and the study of its weak points clearly indicates the main necessary actions for invigorating the industry and supporting it in reaching its objectives and clarifying its vision. These actions may be summarized as follows:

- The institutional structures of the public sector which benefit of trained staff and sufficient resources, must work in partnership with entities in the private sector;
- Market research, segments, clients and communication channels;
- An integrated tourism planning will lead to modernizing, developing and better presenting the tourist products to meet the market's expectations and demands;
- Education and training for the industry personnel at all career levels aimed at customer satisfaction, improving professionalism and enhancing skill level;

- Oriented marketing to establish Romania as a preferential tourist destination.

The successful and sustainable development of tourism does not depend exclusively on attractive landscapes and tourism facilities, but also on competitive, high quality services.

Being one of the most competitive economic activities in the world, tourism needs comprehension, professionalism, commitment, organizing and efficient strategy of development of human resources.

In the European Union, one of the main preoccupations of the more than 1,7million tourism enterprises – which number at present more than 9.3 million employees (Pelzer and Baksyte, 2009), is to identify the best modalities to maintain and professionally develop their human resources.

The level of competence in the hospitality segment of Romanian tourism is still low, in consequence of missing performance standards, and adequate, up-to-date work standards, as well as proper educational and training standards.

Aptitudes regarding hospitality services – at both the professional and behaviour levels are quite limited and need particular attention in the years to come. At the same time, the improvement of attitude towards services and mentalities is a very important aspect.

## **2. Research methodology**

This research plan is focused on the study of tourism offer (particularly reception/arrival/receiving services) in the counties situated along the Lower Danube, i.e. Mehedinți, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Călărași, Constanța, at the border with Bulgaria. The main objective is identifying tourism specific characteristics of these counties, diversity of tourism services rendered, and the results from turning to account their tourism potential, according to synthetic and comparative analyses.

Documentary sources have been used to this end, including statistics data provided by the National Institute of Statistics as well as observations on site.

The Central Administration and economic agents are permanently aware of the need for training specialists in the tourism field. This is the subject matter of several debates in our country, and over the last 5-10 years these debates implied also the Faculty of Commerce of the Academy of Economic Studies as an acknowledged former on the tourism market in Romania. The ideas resulting there from are result of a permanent contact with business environment, the method used being the focus-group and in-depth interview, conducted with managers of hotels, of tourism agencies, representatives of professional associations or of tourism central authority.

Rigorous statistic data referring to the labour force employed in the tourism sector are extremely limited and, yet a synthetic analysis could be achieved based on indicators provided by statistic publications.

At present there is no clear-cut distinction between the jobs in the hospitality sector and those in the travel and tourism sector.

Statistics referring to jobs are structured as jobs in „Hotel and Restaurant” sector, which automatically include all independent restaurants, fast food restaurants, small local

restaurants, etc, while employment in the travel and tourism is related – by the employment statistics – to the field of „Transport and Tourism” which includes all personnel in the public transport sector (MDRT, 2009).

In order to have an image on the educational services specializing in tourism, in the Romanian area of the Lower Danube, we have also achieved an exploratory research on the educational programs offered by specialized institutions (universities and vocational schools). This study included an inquiry carried on among students at the Masters program of Business Administration in Tourism, AES Bucharest; the investigation included 86 MA candidates, the research objectives for identifying their preference to having a career in tourism/hospitality industry and respectively their motivation in choosing that career.

### **3. Results and comments**

#### **3.1. Tourism in the Danubian area – a prerequisite for training tourism specialists**

The Danube is a fundamental component of the Romanian geographic area, having a well determined role in the social and economic context of each historical phase, its ever growing importance continuing also today when economic links and connections are more and more penetrating in the network of territorial administrative and political limitations.

The Danubian area is obviously one of the most important touristic areas of Romania, with highly valuable tourism objectives spreading from the Danube entrance on Romanian territory (one can admire gorges, canyons, caves, mountains, spectacular national reservations and parks) to its pouring into the Black Sea (where the coastal area and especially the Danube Delta are touristic objectives of high economic importance for the Romanian tourism).

Mehedinți County, the first analyzed for its tourism potential aspects, is also considered, thanks to its position on the border, the entrance gate from the South-Western Europe. The Rhine-Maine-Danube channel, inaugurated in 1992 situated the capital of the county in Drobeta Turnu-Severin, and the bridge from the hydro energetic and navigation system Porțile de Fier makes the connection to Belgrade (300km), Istanbul (700km), Athens (950km) and Rome (2000km). Cazanele Dunării is a remarkable natural touristic resource, being as it is Danube's strait area as it passes through the Carpathians. It is 9 km long and is located between Dubova and Eșelnița.

On the lower course of the river Jiu, from which it got its name also, Dolj County highlights itself with a large pallet of natural reservation tourism attractions, like the Punctul fosilifer Bucovăț, dating back to the Paleolithic era, Ornithology Reservation from Ciupercenii Noi, Wild Peonies Reservation in Plenița, unique in Romania.

Olt County, located on the river with the same name, represents an important touristic potential of the analyzed area, through the existence of numerous touristic attractions, like the aits and beaches from the Danube Valley, the line of lakes from the Olt Valley, which appeared from the hydro energetic lakes, the archeological sites from the Paleolithic at Prund-Dirjov in Fărcășele and from Neolithic at Vădastra or the vestiges from the Dacia period, at Sucidava.

The main forms of tourism present in Teleorman County are the transit and entertainment ones, given the areas of special picturesque landscapes on the Danube Valley, close to the lakes and the forests, which also allow practicing fishery (especially on the Danube secondary arms Dunărica and Pasărea and on the lakes Suhaia and Fântâna) and hunting. The most important touristic attractions are The County Museum of History, the Cathedral painted by Ștefan Luchian in Alexandria, the Turris Roman fortress, the Turnu Medieval fortress in Turnu-Măgurele, as well as the Geto-Dacic dwelling in Zimnicea.

Rural tourism, agro tourism, as well as the business tourism characterize the tourism potential of the Giurgiu County. The capital, Giurgiu town, is one of the most important Danubian harbours in Romania. Also, a series of important tourism attractions can be found, like the archeological site in Malu Roșu, the ruins of the Tabiei fortress, the Central Train Station (the first train station in Romania), the Clock Tower. The Friendship Bridge, the longest on the Danube river, is built on two levels - train and road – being also the only mobile bridge.

The Călărași County, declared as territorial-administrative unit in January 1981, is also based on the rural and religious tourism, mainly thanks to the numerous religious tourism objectives, like the Sf Mercurie Monastery in Plătărești, Negoești Monastery, Sf Niculae Orthodox Cathedral or the Dichiseni Crucea de Leac.

The most developed county, from the touristic potential point of view, is Constanța. The towns in this county are among the oldest in Romania, having their origins in the Greek Antiquity. The tourism attractions cover a vast pallet of categories, from natural reservations (Masivul Cheia, Fântânița-Murfatlar, Dunele litorale from Agigea, Hagieni forest), historic vestiges (ruins of the Histria fortress, Tomis fortress, Callatis fortress), museums, religious buildings and numerous resorts on the Black Sea coast.

Tourism receiving services in these countries are of a large diversity, given the types of accommodation units: hotels and motels, youth hotels, hostels, camping and small house units, villas and bungalows, urban and rural tourism pensions, including accommodation facilities on ships.

There are now 1085 accommodation units in the area, representing 22.4% of total units in Romania (year 2008, last available data). About half of these are touristic villas and bungalows, while hotels stand for about one third thereof. The latest years showed a relative stagnation of accommodation offer, only a very slight increase of 0.8%/year being recorded.

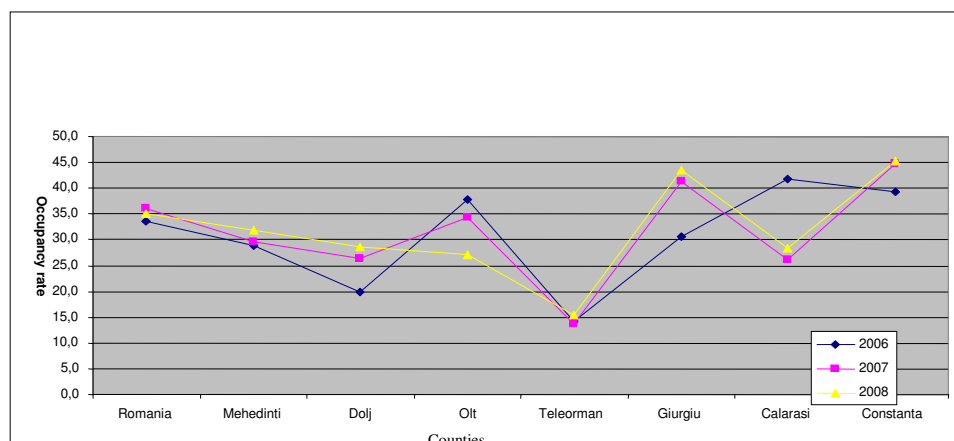
Constanța is the best from this point of view, and this is not surprising at all, since efforts for investments have been made since the 70s aimed at building and promotion of the Black Sea coastal area. Today Constanța County takes advantage of 1066 accommodation units, which means 98% of the whole accommodation offer of the area under study.

With regard to the accommodation places provided by these units, the region has a total of 126.000 places (standing for 43% from the total number at country level). Obviously, the overwhelming majority, i.e. 96% is in Constanța County. This is actually also a proof of the weak tourism endowment of the other Danubian counties and consequently of the big discrepancy in the development and turning to account of the area under study.

Analyses over the last 3 years of the rate of occupancy of the accommodation rooms, point at the same discrepancy in carrying out tourism activities among the counties under study,



as a result of concentration of touristic circulation in Constanța and Giurgiu counties as shown in the figure below.



**Figure no. 3: Evolution of the occupancy rate of accommodation units in the studied counties, between 2006-2008**

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2008. *Romania's Statistical Yearbook*. Bucharest: National Institute of Statistics. Data processed by the authors.

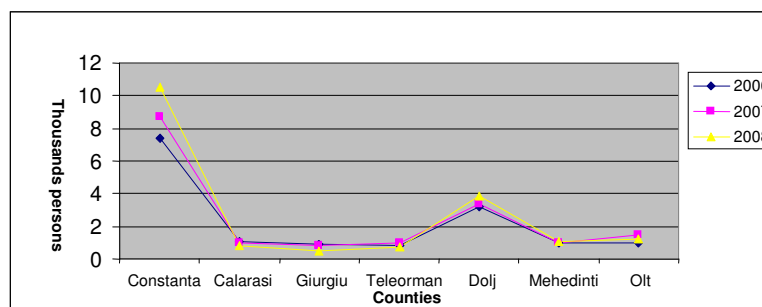
As can be seen above, the average degree of occupation of the accommodation units in the last years was higher in Constanța (40-45%) and Giurgiu (35-43%) counties, while in the other Danubian counties it was around 20-25% (very low figures); over the last 3 years, the county average value of this indicator was around 35%.

### 3.2. Employment and training of the labour force in tourism

As explained above, it is difficult to identify the correct number of the indicator „population employed in tourism”, on account of the lack of true statistic information. The only statistic record refers to the population employed in „Hotels and Restaurants”, which does not fully reflect the hospitality industry sector.

Considering this data provided by official domestic statistics, one can notice the very low share taken by the population engaged in this activity in the tertiary sector: while at the country level, the share of population occupied in hotel and restaurants was 1.6% in 2008 (154 thousand people), versus a total of 9369 thousand people employed in the economy, in the studied area, the population employed in hotel and restaurants numbered 18.7 thousand people in 2008, standing for a share of 1.5% of the total number of people employed in these counties' economic activities. It is interesting to mention that, though the total number of employed people vacillated slightly over the last 3 years, in the counties under study, the number of people working in this activity increased (in 2007 there were 15.4 thousand people).

Information on the number of people engaged in hotels and restaurants in different counties is provided in figure no. 4.



**Figure no. 4: Evolution of the number of people employed in hotels and restaurants in the counties under study, between 2006-2008**

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2008. *Romania's Statistical Yearbook*. Bucharest: National Institute of Statistics.

Training labour force in tourism and hospitality industry is now carried on in keeping with educational programs provided by specialized high-schools, vocational schools, universities. Considering the area under study, such educational services are concentrated especially in Constanța but we can likewise take into account Bucharest offer which addresses the entire area.

Obviously, the capital town of the country concentrates most of the specialized institutions at all levels of study – high-schools, vocational, universities. It is added other big town of the Lower Danube region – Drobeta Turnu-Severin, Craiova, Turnu Măgurele, Alexandria, Giurgiu, Constanța.

Considering the reasons at the basis of the research – cross border cooperation – our partner in Bulgaria being the University „D. Tsenov Economic Academy” of Svisthov – we shall pursue results of the study on university education.

The Faculty of Commerce of the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest (AES), included study of tourism as a university subject in the late sixties of the last century, this being the only faculty with this kind of preoccupations in the educational plan. Subsequently, in 1977, tourism was promoted to specialization rank, while after 1990, its study began in the frame of several public or private universities in Bucharest and other towns in the country (Lupu, 2006).

Once Romania adhered to the European Union, the Bologna teaching system was adopted, its structure being as follows: bachelors program for 3 years, master degree programs (in-depth or complementary) for 2 years, doctoral school (3 years). These can be added teaching programs such as post university courses (specialization and perfectioning), postdoctoral schools as well as summer schools. Study of tourism is present at all of these levels.

In the bachelor program there are two fields in which tourism can be studied, i.e. „Economy” (specializing in „Economy of Commerce, Tourism and Services”) and respectively „Business Administration” (specialization in „Administration of Business in Commerce, Tourism, Services, Commodity Science and Quality Management”). In the subject-area of our study, these specializations are present in Universities of Bucharest, Constanța, Craiova and Drobeta Turnu-Severin.

Masters degree programs are more diverse. They may address either those who continue their studies in the same field and possibly even specialization (in-depth master degree type „master of science”), or those who change the field of bachelor specialization, following up their education with another field (complementary or professional masters degree). The names of these programs are suggestive of the subject matter studied: „Administration of Business in Tourism or Hospitality Industry”, „Management and Marketing in Tourism”, „Business in Tourism”, etc.

Among the disciplines of strict specialization which are present in most of these programs, we can mention: Economy of Services, Economy of Tourism, Techniques of Tourism Operations, Administration of Commerce, Tourism, Services Enterprise, Ecotourism, Hotel and Restaurant Technology, Ethics in Commerce, Tourism, Services, Tourism Marketing, Management of Tourism Destinations, Hotel Administration, Management of Human Resources in Tourism, Management of Projects in Tourism, Diagnosis and Evaluation in Tourism, Management of Event Tourism, Operational Management in Tourism, etc.

High level interest in the study of tourism always depends on the way in which their field of activity is perceived by the youth, on the development level tourism has in a given period of time, on public policy meant to encourage tourism, on the demand existing on the labour force market, on the rate of investment in hotels or other tourism services, on the society dynamics in general. Obviously the same thing is valid also for the other education levels, practically for all professions linked with tourism.

To this end, we planned a survey among students attending the masters’ degree program of „Business Administration in Tourism” of the Faculty of Commerce, Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest. The survey was carried out in 2009, including 86 persons and, as mentioned above, it was meant to point out young people’s attitude to a possible career in tourism and hospitality industry. Mention should be made that about one third of the people inquired were already working in tourism, and most of them expressed the desire to continue to work in the field: their preferences however pointed to a job in a travel agency (50%), and fewer in hotels (34%) or restaurants (7%). Likewise other questions (supposed to identify the attractiveness degree of this field) showed clearly the youth’s preference to travel and tourism sector rather than hospitality industry.

The motivations at the basis of the preferences are quite diverse and point to a rather subjective nature; perhaps the only objective factor may have to do with the rather limited income level in the „Hotel and Restaurant” branch, one of the lowest in the Romanian economy, as presented also by official statistics.

In an attempt at identifying the motives lying at the basis of preference or rejection of a career in tourism and hospitality industry, we selected the following reasons presented in the following table.

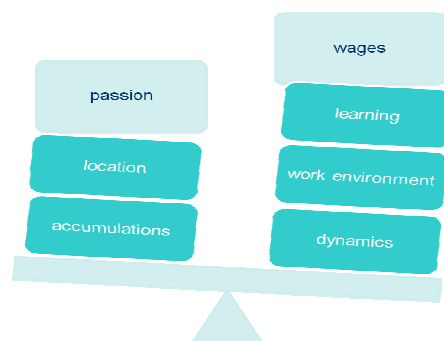
**Table no. 2: Reasons lying at the basis of preference or rejection of a career in tourism and hospitality industry**

<b>„pro reasons”</b>	<b>„con reasons”</b>
Communication with clients possibilities in a diverse cultural environment 46%	Relatively low level of wages 68%
Rapid promotion possibilities, comparing	Inconvenient working schedule 52%

<p>with other activity domains 41%</p> <p>Dynamic and varied character of work 25%</p> <p>The dynamism of tourism/hotels industry, including Romania 25%</p> <p>Pleasant work environment, characterized by a high degree of professional expertise, in chains hotel 23%</p> <p>Quick learning , possibilities of professional development 23%</p> <p>Opportunity of promotion to a hotel in a foreign country, within the hotel chain 14%</p> <p>Important income, while accumulating experience 14%</p> <p>Extra benefits (hotels services) 11%</p> <p>Desire to help the clients, satisfying their needs 7%</p>	<p>High physical and psychical overload 32%</p> <p>Lack of promotion possibilities in small size hotels 20%</p> <p>Inobservance of the quality standards of the hotels services 14%</p> <p>Insufficiently prepared personnel 14%</p> <p>Required experience in the domain 14%</p> <p>Low level of work dynamics 11%</p> <p>Clients may be hard to please 7%</p>
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Making a synthesis of the main reasons to develop a career in tourism and hospitality industry, one can notice that material aspects are dominant but at the same time, the work dynamics in this field, learning possibilities or the very pleasant work environment cannot be ignored either.

Moreover, passion for tourism is a sine-qua-non condition for high quality work.



**Figure no. 5: Balance of motives for a career in tourism and the hospitality industry**

And yet, the opinions of several business specialists are extremely critical on future specialists taking into account the quality of present teaching programs or the degree of involvement of young pupils, students.

Most of these opinions point at the insufficient development of training for service in the field of hospitality and tourism in our country.

Courses of professional training specialized for hospitality sector, for training personnel to take jobs in this sector, are insufficient, while tourism training is integrated into special school, high-school and university courses and often insufficiently specialized.

With only few exceptions, non institutionalized continuous training at the work place or out of it is nearly zero, especially quality wise.

Some of international hotel chains have their own internal training programs at company level, yet their efficiency has a rather limited impact in consequence of the relatively big migration of their personnel.

Unfortunately, we can say there is no awareness of the needs for instruction, neither is there educational culture in the sector of tourism and hospitality in Romania. Therefore, a project of international cooperation in this field would not only be welcome but also absolutely necessary.

### **Conclusions**

The sector of hospitality and tourism equally involve facilities and services. Competitive services can be ensured only by well trained and specialized personnel, having an adequate attitude, correct mentality, proper behaviour and fine performances.

To create educated and skilled labour force implies the need for training, basic education and professional courses as well as continuous practical instruction at the work place.

Hospitality implies to satisfy visitors' requirements and to gain the competence to meet or even to exceed visitors' expectations.

If the expectations built up by tourism marketing and promotion fail to be met because of missing skilled/qualified labour force, then tourism activities cannot develop on durable basis.

### **Bulgarian Situation\*\***

Tourism has always been of crucial economic and non-economic importance for the countries in the Lower Danube region, including Bulgaria. However, it is one of the most dynamic and "sensitive" sectors in terms of the internal and external factors for its development. This requires a flexible policy and management in the sector in order to respond adequately to the new realities resulting from both the positive political and socio-economic changes in Europe during the last decade and the negative impact of the global economic crisis on the economies of the countries in the Lower Danube region as a whole and their tourism industries in particular.

The aim of this study is to analyze the new conditions for the development of tourism in the Lower Danube region in the context of the "Danube Strategy" of the EU, the condition of the tourist market in Bulgaria and the Romanian participation in it, as well as the possibilities for development of alternative tourism along the Danube and the possibilities for improvement of the education and training in the field of tourist facilities and services in Bulgaria.

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**\*\* Maria Andreeva**

## **1. The new realities and conditions for the development of tourism in the Lower Danube region**

Due to the negative changes in the business environment caused by the global crisis, the tourism sector suffers from a constantly decreasing number of tourists - incomes are shrinking and the price competition is getting increasingly fierce.

The crisis in tourism is obvious from the economic performance of the sector. For the last two years the countries from the Lower Danube region reported an average decrease of 16% of the revenue from the tourist sector compared to the pre-crisis levels. The number of tourist trips decreased; the tourists became more sensitive towards the prices of tourist services and were looking for the best and most attractive offers. The global financial instability was a form of catharsis for the tourist sectors of the countries from the Lower Danube region and led to a dramatic twist in the rank-list of the best tourist companies.

There are various ways to counteract the crisis in tourism – marketing, institutional, governmental and political, etc.

The countries from the region are becoming aware of the need for a new, common philosophy for the development of the sector – instead of the fierce competition, which brings temporary advantages to some of the countries at the expense of the others, alliance with common strategic goals and concepts for long-term development of tourism.

Guided by the understanding that there is a need for a common strategy for European territorial cooperation, including the development of tourism under the new realities, the European Parliament adopted a special resolution on 21st January 2010 on a European Strategy for the Danube Region. The Parliament called on the European Commission to launch, as soon as possible, broad consultations with all countries along the Danube in order to cover various aspects of regional cooperation and to present the EU Strategy for the Danube Region no later than the end of 2010.

The Resolution stressed the importance of the sustainable tourism as an important instrument for promoting the economic growth of the region, noting the opportunities offered by the various forms of alternative tourism, supports university exchange programmes and the establishment of university networks within the region in order to support the implementation of the Danube Strategy (Резолюция на Европейския, 2010). The Strategy for the Danube Region should be adopted no later than the first half of 2011, under the Hungarian presidency of the EU. It will provide the grounds for implementation of specific projects in this field.

The development of tourism along the Danube, which is often called the “European Amazon”, is a real anti-crisis measure, which will contribute to regional development, bring income to the countries, create new jobs, and ensure the sustainable development of the region.

However, the system of tourism includes various heterogeneous (although closely related) elements bound by a common goal – to meet the needs of the tourists - and thus it can hardly be defined as a separate sector of the economy. Statistically it cannot be associated with only one sector of the economy because it includes the hotel services, restaurant services (which is part of the catering industry), tourist transportation (which is part of the national transportation infrastructure), culture, sports, entertainment, etc. This is why, according to the specialists, the development of tourism under the new realities in the

region may be an efficient anti-crisis measure only if various positive changes in these sectors are present. Some of these changes are<sup>1</sup>:

- Development of Pan-European Transport Corridor № 7 by improving the navigation along the Danube, modernization of the port infrastructure, promotion of intermodal transport, development of cross-links across the river, improving the incoming transport infrastructure, development of information systems and communications;
- Prioritized development of transport infrastructure (road and rail) in the Pan-European transport corridors 4, 9 and 10 as part of the direction Central Europe - Aegean Sea;
- Improving the environmental condition of the Danube, the protection of its biodiversity and local ecosystems;
- Improvement of the Danube settlements, municipalities and regions;
- Large-scale exposure and socialization of the rich cultural heritage of the countries of the Lower Danube region and creation of a common Danube cultural corridor with clearly defined European contents and importance;
- Expansion and upgrading of the tourist facilities, support for the hotel and restaurant business;
- Development of a modern system for education and training in the field of tourism;
- Shaping of overall tourist product based on the specific natural, cultural landscapes and historic environment along the Danube;
- Development of the Danube settlements in an organic unity with the river through the implementation of a new approach of the territorial planning aimed to improve the architectural environment and create a specific outlook and colour of the Danube settlements;
- Improving the quality and effectiveness of advertising activities in the field of tourism;
- Development of territorial cooperation between the countries in the Lower Danube region, etc.

In these and some other fields Bulgaria has initiated some complex projects within the framework of the Danube Strategy and these projects are now subject to a wide public discussion. We have to give a chance not only to the state administration, but also to the municipalities, the business, the non-government sector, and the academic communities to participate in the discussion and implementation of these projects, which are important both for Bulgaria and the complex development of the region as a whole.

An important role for the development of tourist structures and services within the framework of the Danube Strategy will be played by the Danube Competence Centre established in February 2010 in Belgrad. Its founders were representatives of tourist

<sup>1</sup> For more details see: Българският принос за подготовката на Стратегия на ЕС за Дунавския регион, София, Министерство на регионалното развитие и благоустройството, 2010, pp. 6-7.

companies and organizations as well as municipalities from Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine. Its aim is to contribute to the integration of interests, projects, and activities in the field of tourism in the founder countries as well as to participate in the development of sustainable transnational cooperation in the field of tourism.

The "Blue Week" in June 2011 will mark the beginning of joint projects to support the development of tourism in the countries from the Lower Danube region. The "Blue Week" will be held every year simultaneously in all towns along the Danube who have joined the initiative. During the week the municipalities and the local tourist offices shall organize various events related to the possibilities for development of tourism in the Lower Danube region.

## **2. Condition of the Bulgarian tourist market and the participation of Romania in it**

Tourism is very important for the economy of Bulgaria as it generates about 15% of its gross domestic product. After the collapse of the real estate market, the decrease of industrial production, and the withdrawal of the foreign direct investments, tourism is among the few sectors which can provide new added value in the economy.

We may claim that until 2008 there was a stable trend for constant increase of the in the number of foreigners visiting Bulgaria - in 2008 this number was 8 532 972, which is a growth of 10.4% compared to 2007. This trend was most obvious for the tourist visits, where the growth compared to 2007 was 12.2%. (Bulgarian State Tourism Agency, 2009) (Table no. 3)

In 2008 Romania /with 996 716 tourist visits, a growth of 32.9% , a relative share of 17.2% of all tourists, and a relative share of 23.5% of the tourists from the EU/ ranks first in terms of the absolute number of tourist visits to Bulgaria compared to the same period in 2007. According to the official statistics, for the first time in 2007 and 2008 the number of Romanians is greater than the number of tourists from the main tourist market of Bulgaria - Germany and the UK as can be seen from Table no. 4.

The data proves the trend that Romania has become a leading market for the Bulgarian tourism industry.

**Table no. 3: Visits of foreigners to Bulgaria and visits of Bulgarians abroad**

<b>Year</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>08/07 (%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>6240932</b>	<b>6981597</b>	<b>7282455</b>	<b>7499117</b>	<b>7725747</b>	<b>8532972</b>	<b>10.4</b>
<b>Visits of foreigners to Bulgaria</b>							
<b>Tourism</b>	<b>4047863</b>	<b>4629854</b>	<b>4837150</b>	<b>5158117</b>	<b>5151283</b>	<b>5779828</b>	<b>12.3</b>
Recreation	3531567	4010326	4090421	4364557	4218713	4765700	13.0
Private visits	28656	40467	48898	62927	75162	98478	31.0
Business	215760	271857	340039	331845	375613	418374	11.4
Other	271880	307204	357792	398788	481795	497276	3.2
<b>Visits of Bulgarians abroad</b>							
<b>Transit</b>	<b>2193069</b>	<b>2351743</b>	<b>2445305</b>	<b>2341000</b>	<b>2574464</b>	<b>2753144</b>	<b>6.9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3403402</b>	<b>3881693</b>	<b>4234866</b>	<b>4180357</b>	<b>4514547</b>	<b>5726767</b>	<b>29.6</b>



**Table no. 4: The place of Romania as a main tourist market for Bulgaria**

Country	2007	Rel. share in EU	2008	08/07 (%)	Rel. share in EU
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 151 283</b>		<b>5 779 828</b>	<b>12.2</b>	
<b>EU Total</b>	<b>3 732 344</b>		<b>4 240 828</b>	<b>13.6</b>	
<b>Rel. share of EU</b>	<b>72.5</b>		<b>73.4</b>		
<b>Romania</b>	750 083	20.1	996 716	32.9	23.5
<b>Greece</b>	827 351	22.2	843 547	2.0	19.9
<b>Germany</b>	519 894	13.9	580 381	11.6	13.7
<b>UK</b>	353 597	9.5	363 671	2.8	8.6

However, in 2009 Bulgaria was visited by a total of 7,872,805 foreigners, which is a decrease of 7.7% from the previous year. According to the definitions of the World Tourism Organization the number of tourist visits was 5,738,873. This number shows that we have almost reached the level from 2008 with only a slight decrease of 0.7%. A decrease of 20.1% was reported for the excursion and recreation visits - their number was 3,809,561. (Bulgarian State Tourism Agency, 2010) (Table no. 5)

**Table no. 5: Foreign tourists in Bulgaria /2004 – 2009/**

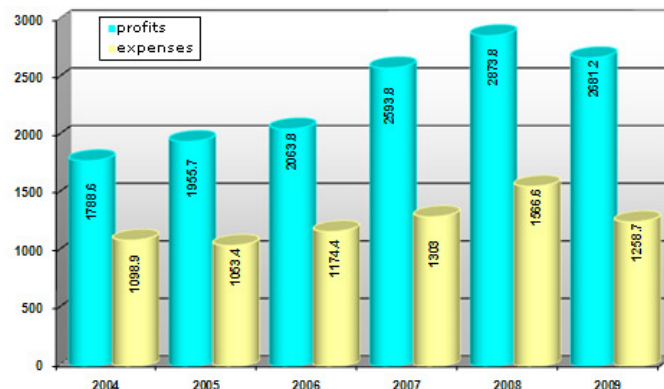
Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	09/08 (%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>6981597</b>	<b>7282455</b>	<b>7499117</b>	<b>7725747</b>	<b>8532972</b>	<b>7872805</b>	<b>-7.7</b>
<b>Visits of foreigners to Bulgaria by goal of visit</b>							
<b>Tourism</b>	<b>4629854</b>	<b>4837150</b>	<b>5158117</b>	<b>5151283</b>	<b>5779828</b>	<b>5738873</b>	<b>-0.7</b>
Recreation	4010326	4090421	4364557	4218713	4765700	3809561	-20.1
Private visits	40467	48898	62927	75162	98478	151508	53.8
Business	271857	340039	331845	375613	418374	1075300	157.0
Other	307204	357792	398788	481795	497276	702504	41.3
<b>Transit</b>	<b>2351743</b>	<b>2445305</b>	<b>2341000</b>	<b>2574464</b>	<b>2753144</b>	<b>2133932</b>	<b>-22.5</b>

According to the data from the Bulgarian National Bank, the revenues from international tourism in the current account balance for the period January - December 2009 amount to EUR 2 681.2 mln., which is a decrease of 6.7% compared to the same period in 2008. At the same time the spending of Bulgarian citizens for trips abroad in 2009 were with 19.7% less than those in 2008. (Figure no. 6).

A decrease of profit in 2009 was reported by almost all companies in the Tourism sector. The analysts monitoring the tourist business in Bulgaria reported at the end of 2009 a decrease of the average employment level and the average price of the hotel accommodation in Bulgaria. The average employment level in the luxury hotels dropped from 57.1% in 2007 to 53.4% in 2008 and to 50.1% in 2009. In 2009 our country was visited by 942,071 Romanians and according to the official statistics they represented the most numerous group of foreign tourists.

In the period January - June 2010 Bulgaria was visited by a total of 2,161,159 foreign tourists, or 1.9% more tourists compared to the same period in 2009. An increase of 12.6% was also recorded for the recreation and holiday visits - a total of 1 388 489 visits.

During this period our country was visited by 402,235 Romanian tourists, which is with about 10.5% less compared to the same period in 2009 (Bulgarian National Statistics Institute, 2010). However, in terms of visits of foreign tourists to Bulgaria, Romania ranks second only to Greece, and many experts predict that during the summer months the tourist flow from Romania will intensify and the Romanian tourists will once again be the most numerous group of foreign tourists in 2010.



**Figure no. 6: International tourism – Bulgaria, balance of payments (mln. EURO)**

In times of crisis, however, Bulgaria attracts mostly the “mass” tourists and over 70% of the income from foreign tourists is generated by our seaside resorts. This unequal distribution is due not only to the commonly affordable “all inclusive” product offered by the hotels along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, but also to the underestimation of the possibilities for other kinds of tourism, including the river tourism on and along the Danube.

According to the Bulgarian economists the Romanian market will become a “lifeline” for the Bulgarian tourism in the next 5 to 10 years because it is geographically close and is huge. Just like increasingly more Bulgarians opt to spend their holidays in Turkey and Greece, we can expect that the Romanian market will expand if the quality of the tourist services is maintained at the same high level and the process are balanced. Thus the trend the Bulgarian tourist companies and hotel managers to adopt the best practices of their counterparts from the neighbouring countries is more obvious nowadays.

For the time being this trend concerns only the tourist business along the Black Sea coast, where for the last few years the 4- and 5-star hotels have managed to maintain a stable price-quality ratio. The number of Romanian tourists is expected to grow because the exotic destinations are very expensive and far away and are usually visited only once while the journey to our resorts takes only a couple of hours and their services are not worse than, say, the services offered in Spain, Cuba, or the Dominican Republic.

The statistics shows that there are Romanian tourists who have visited the same hotel in Bulgaria for 3 or 4 years in a row without getting fed up. Why shouldn't we use these best practices in the field of the short-term tourism along the Danube? Why shouldn't we use the short vacations and holidays (e.g. Easter, and the other official holidays) for relaxation

on the Danube - it is close by, there is a long list of attractive routes for various kinds of tourism and for all types of tourists, etc.

### **3. Possibilities for development of alternative tourism along the Danube**

The specialists in Bulgaria unanimously agree that the financial crisis has had a strong negative effect for the tourist industry. The need for growth of the demand, (and hence - the supply) of new types of tourist services has gradually imposed some new trends for the development of tourism. For the last couple of years there has been a marked diversification of the tourist trip offers - the number of companies specializing in alternative forms of tourism is growing. The growing number of mass tourists looking for "non-mass" tourism is shaping a new segment in this sector.

According to the common economic sense, in times of crisis Bulgaria must develop not only the traditional forms of tourism but also the alternative tourism in order to support its regional economies, to revive the rural areas, to generate new jobs in the local communities, etc.

The "alternative tourism" is defined as any form of tourism which is different from the traditional forms (i.e. holidays on the beach, in the ski resorts, or the spa resorts). The modern people demand *alternative forms of tourism* due to many factors related to the available time off work, the need for active rest, the protection of the environment and the biodiversity, our natural curiosity to get familiar with new cultures and traditions, the village lifestyle, etc.

Bulgaria has all prerequisites for alternative forms of tourism – diversity of natural resources, cultural and historical landmarks, unique customs and traditions, original cuisine, hospitable people, etc. If we combine, package, and market all these factors in the right way, our country may become an attractive destination for hundreds of thousands of tourists.

Another factor for the development of alternative forms of tourism in Bulgaria is the growing popularity and demand for such forms of tourism among the foreign tourists, who are willing to spend more money for interesting and new adventures, for places with unpolluted nature, ancient history, unique customs, and good conditions for sports and recreation. This type of tourists is different from the "all inclusive" tourists, who frequently cannot tell the difference between a holiday in Bulgaria, Turkey, or Spain and who are interested in one thing only - cheap prices.

Despite the availability of all necessary factors, the alternative forms of tourism in Bulgaria are still undeveloped. The official statistics cannot provide information neither about the number of "non-mass" tourists visiting the country nor about their preference in terms of products and services. According to some business people from this sector only 5 to 10% of the foreigners who visited our country chose destinations other than the seaside and ski resorts. The alternative tourism business in Bulgaria is still undeveloped and is generally run by individuals, family companies, and small businesses.

Moreover, until recently the alternative tourism in Bulgaria was limited to sightseeing trips of the "traditional" historical and architectural sights – Veliko Tarnovo, the old town of

Plovdiv, the Rila monastery, Koprivshtitsa, and a weekend trips to some of the natural sights.

The great variety of opportunities for alternative tourism in our country (such as: mountain climbing, eco-tourism, extreme tourism, cultural tourism, folklore tourism, healing and wellness (spa) tourism, sport tourism, exhibition and congress tourism, agricultural tourism, fishing tourism, bicycle tourism, hobby tourism, religious tourism, wine tourism, event-based tourism, adventure-based tourism, photo tourism, tracking, etc.) is still unpopular and these forms are currently out of the scope of interest of the tourist companies.

Here we would like to pay special attention to an alternative form of tourism which is quite well developed in the other countries from the Lower Danube region - the rural tourism: a week-end at a place with beautiful nature and architecture and accommodation in a village house. Besides village houses, accommodation can be provided in modern hotels located in the small villages with unpolluted environment which still exist in Bulgaria - in both scenarios the aim is to provide a fulfilling and varied recreation among the local lifestyle, traditions and culture. This form of alternative tourism is sometimes the only alternative for "saving" the Bulgarian villages from depopulation - especially in the mountain areas, which abound in incredibly beautiful natural sights and may become unique tourist attractions.

The Bulgarian tourist companies have to take advantage of the favourable conditions in the country in order to develop sustainable alternative business providing high quality services as an appropriate and timely anti-crisis measure to save and develop the tourism in general and the tourism in the Lower Danube region in particular. This is valid not only for the tourist companies in Bulgaria but also for their counterparts from the other countries in the Lower Danube region. Therefore we have to encourage the trans-border integration networks for development of joint tourist products.

Special attention should be paid to the cruise tourism - a form which has been growing rapidly in Europe for the last few years. Thousands of tourists from all over the world travel around Europe by luxury cruise ships looking for something different from the mass tourism.

The Danube cruise tourism may be developed as a joint tourist product including some of the following sights:

- In Bulgaria: the antique Roman tomb in Silistra; Demir Baba Teke; the Ibrahim Pasha mosque, the Srebarna natural preserve; the Tracian tomb near the village of Sveshtary; the historical town of Rousse; the Cherven fortress; the rock churches near the village of Ivanovo; the Yantra bridge; the historical town of Svishtov; Nikopolis ad Istrum; the old Bulgarian capital of Veliko Tarnovo; the synagogue and the Baba Vida medieval fortress in Vidin, etc.;
- In Romania: the Danube delta; Kalush - the ritual dance in the area of Olt in Southern Romania; Histriya - a Greek, Roman, and Byzantine town, etc.;
- In Serbia: the Belgrade fortress; the Golubintsi-Kupinovo ethnographic park; the castle in Smederevo; the Petrovaradin fortress in Novi Sad; the Golubats fortress; the archaeological area of Lepenski Vir; the vineyard settlements in Pivnitse; Sirmium; Sremski Karlovtsi; the Franciscan monastery in Bach, etc.

In times of crisis the so called "multi-active" programmes - a combination of mountain climbing, visits of historical sites, sport, and hotel or guesthouse accommodation - may be

very attractive. Thus for only a week the tourists will be able to enjoy a little bit of everything at a reasonable price. Such programmes can be organized for groups and individual tourists as well.

Novelties in the alternative programmes recently have been the increasingly diversified forms of sport tourism. Bulgaria can offer good conditions for various types of sports, including the fashionable extreme sports - rafting, kayaking, mountain biking, paragliding, climbing, scuba diving, caving, etc. These sports may become important factors for the development of the alternative forms of tourism.

The successful development of alternative tourism which will benefit all countries in the region requires a wide publicity of all alternative forms of tourism available along the Danube through suitable advertising, common multi-language web pages, training and education, etc.

#### **4. Problems of education and vocational training in the field of tourist facilities and services in Bulgaria**

The main institutions providing vocational training and education in the field of tourism in Bulgaria are the vocational secondary schools, the vocational colleges (both Bulgarian and joint-ventures), the universities and the vocational training centres (VTC).

The latter are legal entities licensed by the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training to provide vocational education and training. The licenses VTCs can be state-owned, municipal, or private, as well as joint-ventures between Bulgarian and foreign companies or foreign subsidiaries. They provide vocational education and training for acquisition of first, second, or third degree of vocational qualification or qualification in a part of a profession as well as courses for upgrade of the acquired vocational qualification.

For the past few years the interest in the vocational education and training in the field of tourist facilities and services in Bulgaria has been growing steadily. The serious economic crisis and the gap between the supply and demand on the labour market in Bulgaria require the qualification or re-qualification of a large number of people. Tourism is one of the sectors with the greatest shortage of qualified specialists and this sector may generate a significant number of jobs even in times of crisis.

According to the Bulgarian industrial association, the training courses in *hotel management, restaurant management, and catering* have the largest relative share of all vocational training courses provided by the VTCs in 2009 (Българска индустриална асоциация, 2009). The number of the trainees in these courses represents more than 20% of all trainees attending the VTCs during this period.

The number of trainees in the vocational courses in "Travels, tourism, and leisure" is smaller - about 4,28% of the total number of trainees. This fact may be explained not with an insufficient interest in these professions but with the length of these courses - they require more time and are provided by colleges and vocational schools.

In 2008 the universities granted the educational and qualification degree of "Professional Bachelor" in the field of "Sports, Tourism, and Hotel Management" to ca. 1100 graduates,

or 18.6% of all graduating professional bachelors (Bulgarian National Statistics Institute, 2009).

Regardless of these figures and the positive trends in the vocational education and training in the field of tourist facilities and services in Bulgaria, we have to mention the following problems:<sup>2</sup>

- Lack of qualified personnel in tourism, leading to lower quality service offering;
- The facilities in professional schools for tourism are outdated and inadequate to the new requirements and criteria in the training;
- No consistency in upgrading of knowledge between secondary and higher education in tourism;
- Gaps in trainers' knowledge;
- Lack of motivation, inadequate pay and turnover of teaching staff;
- Lack of clear strategy for training of personnel in tourism;
- Lack of application of modern methods in education;
- Poor practical training of trainees;
- Obsolete regulations for training in tourism;
- Lack of knowledge for good practices in tourism training in other countries;
- Insufficient funds are used in European programs for development and modernization of education and professional training in the field of tourism;
- Majors and courses offered do not cover the entire spectrum of needs of the industry, etc.

### **5. Directions for improvement of education and training in the field of tourism facilities and services in Bulgaria**

A modern, well-structured, and practice-oriented training in the field of tourism would contribute immensely to the improvement of the quality of the tourist services in our country. It would increase the trainees' level of competitiveness on the labour market and provide them with new opportunities for employment in tourist agencies or starting of their own businesses in the field of tourism.

In order to solve some of the above problems and to enhance the system of vocational education and training in the field of tourism facilities and services in Bulgaria we have to implement the following measures:<sup>3</sup>

- Improvement of the facilities in professional schools for tourism in the country, using domestic sources of funding as well as co-financing projects through EU funds;
- Establishment of efficient systems for continuity of knowledge upgrade, modernize curriculum and programs, elimination of duplicate items and examinations taken during the course of education and training;

<sup>2</sup> For more details see: Професионално обучение на кадрите в туризма – настояще, проблеми и решения, София, Българска туристическа камара, 2009, p. 2 and cons.

<sup>3</sup> For more details see: Професионално обучение на кадрите в туризма – настояще, проблеми и решения, София, Българска туристическа камара, 2009, pp. 3-4.

- Development and implementation of incentives for staff retention and prevention of attrition in the field of education;
- Establishment of teacher training centres in the field of tourism;
- Periodic accreditation of teachers;
- Changes in the legal framework regulating education and training initiatives in tourism;
- Provision of better opportunities for learning practice of students in tourism, the introduction of mandatory practice;
- Development of a national strategy for promotion of education and training in tourism, with the direct participation of representatives of universities, vocational schools and colleges, industry structures and businesses.

An important condition for improvement of the vocational education and training in the field of tourism is to reform the conceptual training methodology. It should be based on the didactic principle that knowledge and skills are acquired best when they are provided in a suitable manner, i.e. when attention is paid not only to the contents but also to the forms of training.

The process of education should include more active training methods developing the independent, non-conventional, and creative thinking of the trainees such as the situation analysis method, the business games and scenarios method, group discussions, confrontational meetings, brainstorming, programmed training, interactive methods, etc. The implementation of these active methods would lead to a radical change in education - from passive it may become active. Some of the most important benefits from the implementation of active methods of vocational education and training in the field of tourism facilities and services in Bulgaria are:

- they develop the skill for practical implementation of the theoretical knowledge;
- they liberate the trainees from the habit to be mere receptacles of facts, concepts, and techniques and develop their attitude and skills to diagnose problems, analyse and evaluate alternatives, take optimal decisions, and develop adequate action plans;
- they provide the trainees with real-life environment and situation - where there are no ready answers and solutions and they cannot rely on their previous experience;
- they present to the trainees the practical experience of the Bulgarian tourist companies and the best European practices in the field of tourism;
- they develop the trainees' skills for creative thinking in the dynamic and turbulent environment of economic crisis periods;
- they develop the trainees' capacity for taking collective decisions and their team-building skills;
- the real-life nature of the analyzed cases would ensure the attention of the trainees throughout the course, etc.

The widespread implementation of active training methods would undoubtedly pose some new requirements for both the trainees and trainers. The training based on such methods requires the active participation of the trainees. Practice has shown that these methods guarantee the most useful and durable acquisition of new knowledge and skills. The lecture-based classes (even when they involve the use of modern equipment and attractive Power Point presentations) should be minimized and used only as a background for the role-play and group discussion classes where the trainees should seek the optimum solution of each case.

An important complement to the active training methods could be the so-called “inclusive observation” organized in tourist facilities and including the use of tourist services. The “inclusive observation” provides the trainees with the opportunity to decide which elements of the tourist services they should adopt and use in their professional field and what errors they should not make in their future career.

### **Conclusions**

The research shows that the tourism will play more and more decisive role for stimulating the economic development of the Lower Danube region and it will contribute to the faster recovery from the economic crisis.

The Romanian tourist market is extremely important for the tourism branch in Bulgaria and has huge potential for development. In the same time this fact greatly raises the criteria for qualitative and affordable service for which marketing strategy must be developed.

In spite the big role of tourism for economic development of Bulgaria, it's too single-side developed and some attractive forms of alternative tourism, for which in Bulgaria are fine conditions, are not used. Special accent in the boundaries of Danube strategy should be put on Danube cruise tourism.

Education of persons, working in the field of visitor receiving structures and tourism services does not match the modern European criteria and the need of the practice. The delay in this sphere may be overcome through modernization of the whole education process, including application of modern active methods of education.

Big role for increasing the quality of the education and training in the field of visitors receiving structures and tourism services has cooperation between the universities in the Danube region, which prepare specialists for tourism sector and more – specially the cooperation between the Bulgarian and Romanian universities.

### **Final remark**

Generally, all reforms of the system of vocational education and training in the field of tourism facilities and services in Bulgaria and Romania should be based on the concept that the highly qualified personnel is the key for the success of the companies deriving their profits from and specializing in the tourism sector and that this system should provide the best education and training for the future specialists in the field of tourism and hospitality.

The D. Tsenov Academy of Economics in Svisthov, Bulgaria and the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest, Romania have the unique chance to cooperate in the boundaries of the Program for trans-border cooperation as well as the Danube strategy in



the field of human resources development, in order to bring new ways of education and training in the field of visitors receiving structures and tourism services in the Lower Danube Regions.

Also, the potential and research experience of both institutions must be exploited. The creation of development projects for new touristic products in the Danube region, which would enhance the attractions and touristic services from the surrounding areas, thus providing the market with complex and integrated programs, is another direction of collaboration.

There are also real possibilities of collaboration through professors and students exchange programs, within the Erasmus program, as well as through the creation of joint Masters programs, with the Tourism and Hospitality Industry specialization.

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